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REPORT FROM WASHINGTON

By Fred Zusy

WASHINGTON-- The role of the New China News Agency (NCNA)

as an official propaganda organ of the Peking Government, although it claims to be ~~an~~ an independent, bona fide news agency, has drawn the attention of concerned quarters here.

CPYRCH The Communist Chinese agency, which has been described in a Peking periodical (Hsin Wen Yu Chu Pan, August 25, 1957) as "the mouth and ears of our people, the Party and the Government," has grown tremendously since the Communists seized power on the mainland 10 years ago.

Since Communist China is undoubtedly newsworthy and because virtually the only news that comes directly out of the country is channeled through NCNA, its reports are frequently used abroad for lack of an alternative. NCNA is well run. Some experts here term it the most efficient of all Communist news agencies -- including Tass -- today. Newer on the scene than Tass, NCNA has not yet acquired the same repute attached to Tass, and its reports tend to receive more credence. NCNA reports distributed abroad tend, however, to be highly colored and are designed to portray Communist China in the most favorable light.

Enjoying a monopoly on news dissemination in Red China, NCNA maintains a wide network of correspondents throughout the world. It has been concentrating its attention in the past several years on the uncommitted countries, particularly those of Asia and Africa. Here it has generally received a friendly reception, partly because of the apparent mutuality of interests of China and the Afro-Asian countries. Observers here note that more recently NCNA has expanded its activities to include Latin America, where Peking is reported exercising an increasing influence over local Communist parties. NCNA has established a branch in Havana, Cuba, and announced plans to publish a Chinese-language paper for the Cuban Chinese community, which is the largest in Latin America.

The NCNA network of correspondents overseas extends into all the Iron Curtain countries, as well as in Great Britain, France, West Germany, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Iraq, United Arab Republic, Yemen, Morocco, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In some countries the NCNA staff numbers only one or two persons, but the Hong Kong office, for example, numbers 80 to 100. The NCNA offices generally provide free daily news bulletins to the local

press. In some countries where neither NCNA nor the Communist Chinese foreign office has representation, daily news bulletins are distributed by mail.

Informants here state that although NCNA purports to be a bona fide news agency it is actually a juridical arm of the Peking Government, directed by the Second Staff Office (Culture and Education) of the State Council of the Chinese People's Government. Policy control is exercised by the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party.

All NCNA employees are government civil servants, from the highest-paid editor to the most lowly janitor.

Strangely enough, the foreign news disseminated by NCNA both domestically and abroad is based almost exclusively on Tass reports, which it receives directly from Moscow, raising a question as to the purpose of NCNA's own wide network of correspondents.

Tass, itself, seems to provide the answer. In a report on Tass issued in 1954, the International Press Institute noted that only a fraction of the information sent to Moscow by Tass foreign correspondents was ever printed in the Soviet press, and concluded that "the greater part (of this information) can be regarded as military, political and economic intelligence." Although NCNA personnel have to now not ~~not~~ been caught in flagrant acts of espionage, as have numerous Tass correspondents, it is assumed that NCNA foreign correspondents are primarily intelligence agents, and secondly, propagandists, with journalistic interests running a poor third.

NCNA's role as an arm of the Peking regime was clearly demonstrated during the Tibet events of March, 1959. For almost a week after the news of the Tibet affair had become public knowledge, NCNA failed even to mention the subject. When it finally did so, it attempted to describe the matter as a minor affair precipitated by "reactionaries" at the instigation of Western "imperialists and colonialists."

When the Dalai Lama reached the safety of India and revealed to the world at his Tezpur press conference the full extent of the Communist outrages and suppression in his homeland, NCNA resorted to the feeble tactics of trying to persuade the world that the Dalai Lama had been kidnapped and was the prisoner of Western "imperialist agents" or Indian "expansionists" who had forced him to make such charges.

A comparison of NCNA domestic and foreign reporting on the same event proves most revealing with respect to the reliability of its dispatches.

For example, on October 20, 1958, an NCNA story, datelined Yinchuan and sent by radioteletype in English to western and northern Europe, described ceremonies held that day in Yinchuan in connection with the inauguration of a Ninghsia Hui (Chinese Moslem) Autonomous Region. According to NCNA, Lin-Po-chu, a

Politburo member and the official Peking representative at the ceremonies, was given "a rousing welcome at Yinchuan station today by 30,000 Hui and Han (Chinese) people." Describing the "festive air" which prevailed in Yinchuan because of the event, the story asserted that "the setting up of the autonomous region x x x was widely supported among the Hui people." In its entirety, the report conveyed a picture of the most harmonious relations between the Peking regime and its Moslem minority subjects.

A far different picture was conveyed by an NCNA home broadcast of October 17, 1959, also datelined Yinchuan, and reporting on a forum of Hui people held under the auspices of the China Islamic Association at Yinchuan from August 17 to September 6. According to NCNA, the long meeting had been devoted chiefly to denunciations of the "anti-Communist, anti-people and anti-socialist crimes of Ma Chen-Wu." Ma, it was alleged, had attempted to organize a revolt at Chenshiach'a in Funghsin hsien (district) on June 1, with a view to establishing an "Islamic Democratic Party" and a "Hui Republic in the Ninghsia area," which would strive to achieve "unification of the Party, government, religion and army" and to win "glory for Islam."

The implications of the charges against Ma become clear when it is realized that he was not some insignificant individual but one of Communist China's leading Moslems. The NCNA internal broadcast identified him as a member of the Preparatory Committee for Ninghsia Hui Autonomous Region, head of the Kuyuan Hui Autonomous Chen and Vice President of the China Islamic Association as well as a former member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference and the Nationality Affairs Commission of the Northwest Military and Administrative Committee.

The two broadcasts are obviously not compatible. If the home broadcast is accepted as true, it can only mean that Communist-Hui relations are so bad that one of China's highest-ranking Hui leaders was willing to risk everything to lead his people in revolt against domination by Peking. Yet, in its foreign broadcast five days later, NCNA claimed that the Hui people widely supported the Communist regime. The only conclusion is that one of the NCNA broadcasts was a lie.

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